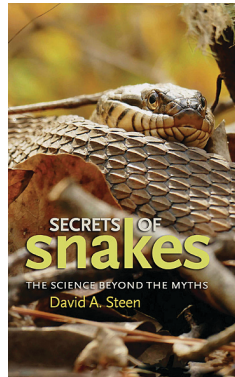


HERPETOLOGY

Secrets of Snakes: The Science Beyond the Myths. W.L. Moody, Jr., Natural History Series

By David A. Steen. 2019. Texas A&M Press. 184 pages and 103 colour photos, 25.00 USD, Flexbound. Also available as an E-book.

Snakes are one of the few groups of animals that commonly elicit fear in a high percentage of people. Fear of snakes has led to much misinformation about them, including many long-held beliefs (or myths) about snake biology and behaviour. The author of *Secrets of Snakes*, David Steen, has studied snakes for many years, and is also a well-known science communicato-



tor. Steen is frequently asked questions on the many myths about snakes, particularly in the United States, and decided to write this book to answer some of the most common questions and to dispel these myths. The myths that venomous snakes can be identified by the triangular shape of their head, venomous coral snakes can be identified based on one specific colour pattern, and cottonmouths will chase people are just some of those that Steen takes on in this book. Spoiler alert: these three myths, along with many others in the book, are false. However, Steen does a great job of explaining why these myths are false while simulta-

neously educating the reader about these species.

As an ecologist who studied snakes for my Ph.D. research, and as an avid naturalist who has continued to appreciate snakes, I found *Secrets of Snakes* a pleasure to read. Steen's writing style is easy to read, and he kept me interested throughout the book with various stories from the field and anecdotes from research on the various topics. However, the myths that Steen addresses are mostly focussed on species that occur in the United States and not in Canada. For example, cottonmouths and copperheads do not occur in Canada, but are the main focus of many of the chapters. For this reason, I would not recommend this book to the average Canadian naturalist, simply because the myths about snakes that Steen addresses are too regionally specific and do not involve species or myths that most Canadians would come across. I would, however, wholeheartedly recommend this book to naturalists interested in snakes or any naturalists interested in exploring the fauna of the United States.

WILLIAM D. HALLIDAY

Wildlife Conservation Society Canada,
Whitehorse, YT, Canada and

School of Earth and Ocean Sciences,
University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada

©The author. This work is freely available under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0).